

After some while, it was determined that this was not a credible intelligence piece of information. But for a month or so, there was great concern about the prospect of a terrorist group having stolen a nuclear weapon, smuggled it into an American city, and being able to detonate it. Then we were not talking about 9/11; we were talking about a catastrophe in which hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people would be killed and life on Earth would never be the same. When and if ever a nuclear weapon is detonated in the middle of a major city on this planet, life will change as we know it.

That brings me to this question of nuclear reduction treaties and the work that has gone on. We have about 25,000 nuclear warheads on this planet. I have just described the apoplectic seizure that existed in October of 2001 because one CIA agent suggested he had credible evidence or a rumor that one terrorist group had stolen one small 10-kiloton nuclear weapon. Think of the angst that caused for about a month, which most Americans don't know about. But that was one weapon. There are 25,000 on this Earth—25,000 nuclear weapons. Russia probably has around 15,000.

This is not classified, by the way. This is from a recent estimate by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Most people say it is accurate. The United States has 9,400. China has 240. France has 300. Britain has 200.

The loss of one to a terrorist group—the detonation of that nuclear warhead in a major city would change life as we know it on planet Earth. So the question is, What do we do about that? We struggle to try to accomplish two goals—one, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to others who don't now have it, to prevent terrorists from ever acquiring it, and working very hard to accomplish both even while we again try a systematic reduction of nuclear weapons from the 25,000 level and particularly among those that have the most nuclear weapons. We understand it is very difficult to reach these agreements, and when reached, it is very difficult to get them agreed to, get the support by what is necessary in the Senate.

About 95 percent of the nuclear weapons are owned by the United States of America and by Russia. There are a lot of groups in this world that are very interested in acquiring one nuclear weapon with which to terrorize this planet.

We are now operating under the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, known as the Moscow Treaty. It requires the United States and Russia to have no more than 2,200 deployed nuclear weapons—there are many more than that; I am talking about deployed in the field—by 2012.

The Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty we are now operating under does not restrict any nuclear delivery vehicles at all—airplanes, missiles, and so on—and it does not have any verification measures and it expires in 2012.

A few weeks ago in Prague, the Czech Republic, President Obama and Russian President Medvedev signed a new strategic arms control treaty. It is called START. I compliment the administration for successfully completing this treaty. I was part of a group in the Senate that continued to meet with and review with the negotiators the progress of their work. Their work was long and difficult, but they reached an agreement with the Russians.

It limits each side to 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads, which is 30 percent lower than the Moscow Treaty under which we are now operating.

It limits each side to 800 deployed and nondeployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers—these are all delivery vehicles—equipped for nuclear armaments. That is one-half of what the START treaty allowed.

It sets a separate limit of 700 deployed ICBMs and SLBMs and deployed heavy bombers that are equipped for nuclear weapons.

The treaty, in addition, has a verification regime, which is very important. You can have a treaty with someone, but if you cannot verify and inspect, then you have a problem. This treaty with the Russians has onsite inspections and exhibitions, telemetry exchanges, data exchanges and notifications, and provisions to facilitate the use of a national technical means for treaty monitoring.

This, in my judgment, is a good treaty that will strengthen this country. It will reduce by 30 percent the number of strategic nuclear warheads that Russia could possess and target at the United States. It allows our country to determine our own force structure and gives us the flexibility to deploy and maintain our strategic nuclear forces in a way that best serves our own national security interests.

The new Nuclear Posture Review, as my colleagues know, says the United States will maintain the nuclear triad of land-based missiles, ballistic missile submarines, as well as bombers. The Obama administration has said as long as nuclear weapons exist, this country will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal to deter any adversary and to protect our allies.

This new START treaty gives us an important window into Russia's strategic arsenal and to ensure that Russia will not be able to surprise us and try to change that balance.

This treaty contains no limits on our ability to continue developing and fielding missile defenses. Our country is doing some of that. Frankly, I have some questions about the cost and the effectiveness of some of what we are doing. Nonetheless, there is no limitation on that in this treaty.

As was done in the case of START, Russia has made a unilateral statement regarding missile defenses. Its statement is not legally binding and does not constrain us in any of our U.S. missile defense programs.

In my judgment, this treaty is very important. It is a very important first step—only a first step—because much more needs to be done. But it is important in terms of enhancing our security and world security. This will bolster, in my judgment, the Nonproliferation Treaty. It demonstrates that the United States and Russia are living up to their part of the deal under the NPT to begin reducing arms. I think it will strengthen Washington's hand in a tighter nuclear nonproliferation regime, especially at the May NPT conference.

Some Senators have said, as would be the case, I suppose, with any treaty: We are concerned about this because we think it weakens America's hand; we think it cuts our nuclear arsenal too deeply. I think they are wrong on that point. They are wrong. We have plenty of nuclear weapons. Not enough nuclear weapons is not among our problems; we have plenty. So do the Russians. We can blow up this planet 150 times and more. We have plenty of nuclear weapons. The question is, How do we and the Russians and others begin to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, and, most important, how do we stop the spread of nuclear weapons?

Let me put up a chart that shows what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said last month:

I, the Vice Chairman, and the Joint Chiefs, as well as our combatant commanders around the world, stand solidly behind this new treaty, having had the opportunity to provide our counsel, to make our recommendations, and to help shape the final agreements.

This is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He says he and the Joint Chiefs believe this represents our country's best national security interest.

Here is what some others are saying. Douglas Feith, not particularly unexpected. I can pretty much guess what he will say on anything dealing with security if I saw his name tag, I guess. Doug Feith, a former Defense official under the previous administration, says:

Since the administration is so eager for [the treaty], the main interests of conservatives—

Meaning him and his friends, neocons among other things—

will relate to modernization. Republicans are interested in the U.S. nuclear posture, the political leverage they have will be the treaty . . . One of the hot issues is going to be the replacement warhead . . .

What does he mean? We are going to use this treaty as leverage to force the government to develop a new nuclear warhead program called the RRW, the Reliable Replacement Warhead.

I am chairman of the subcommittee that funds that program. We stopped funding that warhead. That warhead was an outgrowth of the Congress deciding we are not going to fund the provision before it for another nuclear warhead. We remember the provision: Now we have to build earth-penetrating, bunker-buster nuclear weapons. That was the thing about 5 years ago.